

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Principles for Discernment, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: TMC210

Well, certainly on behalf of all of us, we want to say thanks to you guys. Every time I hear you, you're better than the last time and you're always great. So that was just really wonderful. Thank you so much. And we're greatly encouraged that the exaltation of the Lord and our Savior in their music and certainly I'll commit to praying for you as you travel around to represent Christ. Thank you so much. Great to have you with us this morning.

Glad to be back in chapel again with you all this morning. Talking about the issue of discernment. Just in case you wondered a little more detail about this, I wrote a book a few years ago called *Reckless Faith* and the sub-title is "When the church loses its will to discern." It deals with a lot of the issues regarding discernment. And in the back of the book is an appendage, Jonathan Edwards *Theology of Discernment* that's probably worth the price of the book. Anyway, it's the book on *Reckless Faith* on the subject of discernment if you want more information on that.

We're talking about the issue of discernment, basing it on a text from 1 Thessalonians, if you want to turn back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 for a minute, I want to look at just the foundation of our thoughts in verse 20 of 1 Thessalonians 5, "Do not despise propheteos, do not despise messages, really, preaching. Do not look down on it. Do not treat it with triviality. Do not diminish it. Do not belittle it. Take it seriously. But when you hear preaching...verse 21...examine everything. Put it to the test." Obviously the test of Scripture. "Hold fast to that which is good, that which is inherently good and true and shun what is evil in every form."

That's essentially what discernment is. It is hearing and examining like the noble Bereans who searched the Scriptures to see if these things were so. Absolutely critical that we deal with the Scripture precisely. There's a premium on precision because there's a premium on accuracy. I hate to say it, but in the contemporary evangelical world today there is no premium on precision whatsoever. Everybody is sort of entitled to their own spin on Scripture and on theology and amateurs have sort of commandeered evangelicalism today, people who don't have the training or don't have the diligence that it takes to interpret Scripture precisely.

I'm reminded of a book I read a number of years ago, I mentioned when I was back at Southern Seminary a week ago. It was a book on mathematics written by a professor named Alexander Calandra(?) who teaches mathematics, advanced mathematics for Washington State University. And in this book, I don't normally read mathematic books, in fact I don't ever read them but I just

happened to stumble across this and found this very interesting story. Anyway, he was giving an exam to one of his students in one of his advanced mathematics class and the exam only had one question. The question was, "Determine the height of a building with a use of a barometer." How do you do that, was the question. And the student had to only answer that one question. One student turned in his answer and it said this, "Go to the top of the building, tie the barometer to a long rope, lower the barometer to the ground, measure the length of the rope and you have the height of the building with the use of a barometer."

Well the professor agreed that you could get the height of the building with the use of a barometer that way, but that did not demonstrate appropriate knowledge in the subject to command a good grade. And so he said, "I'm sorry, I'm going to have to give you an F unless you'd like another chance, I'll give you one more opportunity to answer the question." He said, "Certainly, I'd be glad for another opportunity. There are many answers to that question."

So the professor said, "You have ten minutes." Nine minutes went by, he hadn't written anything. He finally scratched off his answer. "Take the barometer out on a sunny day. Measure the length of its shadow, then measure the length of the shadow of the building and by the use of simple proportion you can calculate the height of the building because you know the height of the barometer."

Wrong again. Then he said, "I'm sorry, I can't allow that answer either."

He said, "Well here's one you might like. Start at the bottom of the building and go up the stairs. As you go, put the barometer on the wall and mark off a pencil mark as you go. When you get to the top of the building, go back down, count all the pencil marks and you have the height of the building in barometer units."

"Another thing you might like, he said, just as long as you're asking is lean over the edge of the top of the building and drop the barometer and time its speed with a stop watch and then using, there's a formula something S-squared you can determine the height of the building. But," he said, "here's my final answer. The best way to determine the height of a building by the use of a barometer is to go to the basement and knock on the door of the building superintendent and say to him, 'Sir, if you tell me how tall this building is, I will give you this fine barometer.'"

Well the student had a problem with precision. The answer, of course, is there's a difference in the air pressure because of the altitude, but that's no fun. As far as the student was concerned, any ole answer would do. And I think that's sort of what it is in evangelicalism today. As far as most people are concerned, any ole answer about anything will do. But that isn't the way it is in terms of the Scriptures and that isn't what pleases God.

I was recently in Italy and was...another wonderful experience for me to be in Italy. We had a pastors' conference for Italian pastors, only the second one that brings everybody together, all the pastors from all the associations, denominations, church groups. And there aren't very many pastors, evangelical pastors, in Italy. Italy is profoundly engulfed in the cult of Mary, Roman Catholicism, worshiping Mary the Queen of Heaven. And Catholic...basically Catholic power dominates in every aspect of life in Italy. So the churches are small and it's very difficult, it's called a graveyard for missionaries it's so hard to serve there.

Anyway, we had a pastors' conference and it was different because through the years, the evangelical unity in Italy is important because there's so few of them, the churches are so small, there's such a fragile Christian testimony there that everybody wanted to make sure...they circled the wagons, and let's all get along. So let's never make doctrine an issue because doctrine might divide us and we're already so weak, if our testimony gets divided any further, we're going to be just utterly disappearing from the radar. So the idea was, let's not ever bring anything up that's going to divide us. You know, this little group has their little view on this and this on that and so forth so let's never deal with those issues.

So as a result of that, the church in Italy tends to be very, very weak. It doesn't have strong doctrinal foundation. There was a foundation in there, a financial foundation, that had some vision and said, "Let's see if we can't strengthen the Italian church by making doctrine an issue." They invited me to come two years ago. Many of the people thought it wouldn't work. We had about 350 pastors and missionaries come and I just unloaded on them the foundations of Reformed Doctrine. And it was pretty shocking for the first couple of days. And then they began to see the power of the Word of God because we're taking it out of the Word of Scripture. As a result of that conference, they said, "We want more...we want more." We were just there for two weeks. We went back, this time there were 500 pastors and missionaries there and they were just sucking it up like sponges. And in the intervening time and now even in the time looking ahead, they want more and more and more training and right now they're in the process of building a training center down in Sicily where we can send some of our seminary graduates to go and train them even more in the knowledge of what the Word of God has to say. They've gotten a taste of what it is to be precise, a taste of what it is to know sound doctrine. They find that it's much better than the fragile unity that exists when everything is maintained on a shallow level.

Discernment is critical in the life of the church. Knowing sound doctrine is essential in the life of the church. Sound doctrine, Paul said to Timothy, is to be preached, it is to be guarded. It is to be kept as a treasure and passed on to the next generation. Now we said last time there is a lack of discernment in the evangelical world. I gave you the first reason, you remember what it was? Lack of doctrinal clarity and conviction...lack of doctrinal clarity and conviction. That's pretty obvious. We just don't have that.

I remember being on a talk show with a woman, it was a Christian talk show in a major city, big station. And we were talking and it was obvious that she was the host of this Christian talk show. People called up with their questions about their spiritual life and it was more like Christian counseling than Bible questions. But anyway, she was the answer lady. And she said to me in the middle of this discussion, off the air she said, "You know, there's a word that a lot of people use, it's the word 'sanctification.' What does that mean?"

What does that mean? And so I explained to her a little bit about that and after another half an hour or so, we went off the air for a commercial and I said to her, "How did you become a Christian?" Trying to figure out if she was, but I said, "How did you become a Christian?"

She said, "Oh, it was really cool. One day I got Jesus' phone number and we've been connected ever since." That's what she said.

And I guess I had a startled look on my face. I was so stunned by that and I...she looked a little surprised and I said, "What does that mean...what do you mean you got Jesus' phone number and you've been connected ever since?"

She said, "Well what do you mean what do I mean?" That's about as far as she could go. She said, "If somebody asked you why you were a Christian, what would you say?"

I said, "I'm glad you asked. So I explained to her the gospel.

And at the end of that, and I put this in the book, at the end of that she said to me, "O come on, you don't have to go through all of that, do you, to become a Christian?" This is the...this is the Christian answer lady on the radio.

We have a serious problem when we don't know sound doctrine, when sound doctrine is offensive. Let me give you a second reason and we'll kind of work through these things and we'll wrap all this up on Friday. This is just kind of an assessment of why we have the problem we have, the lack of doctrinal clarity and conviction is followed by a failure to be antithetical, get a little bit philosophical there for a minute....a failure to be antithetical.

To put it another way, an unwillingness to disagree...to disagree. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, "When you remove polemics from the church, the church dies. There has to be constant and healthy and serious debate about truth in the church." When you decide that a debate is divisive, disagreement is intolerable because everybody's got a right to his own opinion, the church will die.

It's true. It's essential to be antithetical. It's essential to be willing to say that's wrong and that's right. This is antitheses. We have now this sort of political correct kind of a smarmy sentimental relativism

that prevails in the church that doesn't want to disagree. Nobody's really right and nobody's really wrong. Nothing is really true and nothing is really false. Whatever you feel is to be accepted because you by your own intuition have a right to come to whatever spiritual conclusions you want to come to. That's just deadly to the life of the church. Everything is subjective. Biblical preaching is not relevant today because it's too definitive, it's too offensive, it's too sharp, it's too black and white, it's too absolute.

But if you look at Scripture and just to give you a kind of sweep over Scripture, you would be amazed if you sort of rehearsed this a little bit, and I hope you do this, how black and white and absolute the Scripture is. Jay Adams wrote a paragraph that puts it in to perspective. "From the Garden of Eden with its two trees, one allowed, one forbidden, to the eternal destiny of the human being in heaven or in hell, the Bible sets forth two and only two ways...God's way and all others. Accordingly, people are either saved or lost. They belong to God's people or the world. There is Gerizim, the mount of blessing and Ebal, the mount of cursing. There is the narrow way and the wide way. One leads to eternal life. The other to eternal destruction. There are those who are against and those who are with us. There are those within the Kingdom and those outside the Kingdom. There is life and death, truth and falsehood, good and bad, light and darkness, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, love and hatred, spiritual wisdom and the wisdom of the world. And Christ is said to be the way, the truth and the life and no one may come to the Father but by Him. He is the only name under the sky by which one may be saved," end the paragraph.

And that is exactly the way the Bible presents itself. It presents truth and error, God's way and everybody else's way. There's a right way, there's a wrong way. There's a right interpretation of a passage and every other interpretation is the wrong one. There's a right theology and anything that disagrees with it is a wrong theology. There is a right way to understand God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and salvation and a wrong way. This is on every page of the Bible, from the beginning to the end of Scripture. This antithetical kind of thinking is everywhere...everywhere.

In the Old Testament, give you an illustration of it, in the Old Testament you look at how God put the ceremonial law in place within the ceremonial law, there were distinctions being made that weren't moral. For example, there were clean animals and unclean animals. Remember that? There were certain kind of animals that you could eat and certain kind that you couldn't eat. There were certain kind of birds that fit into the clean and certain kinds that fit into the unclean. And there was this whole structure about clean and unclean. There were certain ways to prepare food, certain ways to treat utensils. You couldn't steal eggs out of a bird's nest and there were all these sort of little rules that didn't have any real moral or spiritual implications to them. And if you ask the question why...why did God put all this stuff in to Judaism? Why all of this distinction in the Old Testament?

And I would like to suggest to you that there wasn't arbitrary at all. It was a means of teaching the Jews down to the smallest little detail of the day how you ate, how you cooked, how you farmed, what

kind of clothes you wore. You couldn't even mix two kinds of fabrics. You had to think about every single thing you did and know there was God's way and there was the other way. And you had to think about that at every single point. You woke up in the morning and you were aware when you put your clothes on that God had prescribed a certain kind of clothes and forbidden a certain kind. And then you went to your meal and there was a certain way to eat and that was the way God had ordained to eat and then there was every other way, the way the Gentiles ate. Farming techniques, justice, health care, holidays, all these things that don't have particularly moral or spiritual components were nonetheless used as what the Bible calls the ABCs, the primer teaching so that you would learn that there was God's way and there is every other way.

Teaching people to go through life with an understanding of thesis and antithesis. Today, all of a sudden, this is just gone. Anybody's sort of able to do whatever they want. No longer are we trying to distinguish God's way from every other way. I remember one time when I was asked if I would become the head of a Christian school, and another Christian college, or university. And the people who were talking to me said, "You know, here's our objective, we want to integrate the Scripture with the wisdom of the world. We're committed to Syncretism and integration."

I said, "Well I think we have a profound difference then. What I want to do is distinguish the truth of God from the wisdom of the world. I'm in to separation. You're in to integration. That is a profound and substantial philosophical difference. I want to make sure in whatever education I'm involved in that people understand God's truth separate from any pollution by the thinking of man. And then that truth of God sits in judgment on all human wisdom. Great difference in those two mentalities. If as James 1:27 says you're going to keep yourself unspotted from the world, if you're going to distinguish the wisdom that is from above from the wisdom that is from beneath, you have to maintain clear understanding of biblical truth.

In Psalm 1, another very distinct separation is made. "How blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked." That's the first thing that I think of when I think about integration, don't walk in the counsel of the wicked. Don't stand in the path of sinners. And don't, for goodness sake, sit down in the seat of scoffers." Don't go to some school and sit down in a seat where the Bible is going to be mocked. Don't do that. That's pretty straight forward. Don't set your course under the counsel of the wicked. Don't stand, is to say, take your position in a pathway designed by sinners and don't sit down in the class that mocks the scoffers.

On the other hand, his delight, the one who is blessed, is in the law of the Lord and in His law He meditates day and night and he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water yields its fruit in its season, its leaf doesn't wither whatsoever he does prospers. The wicked on the other hand are not so, they're like the chaff which the wind drives away and so forth. Again it's about discernment.

I remember when I was...I had the idea that I wanted to pursue a degree at Claremont Graduate School, a degree in theology at one point in my life, a doctoral degree. And I went out there and they said, "Well what you have to do is you have to read 200 books, 200-220 books that are French and German." So very dutifully I marched off to the local junior college over in Glendale and I took German, figuring once I got German down I'd take French and then I'd go over and read all these two hundred books.

Well I just got enough German under my belt to get into one of those books and I decided that all it did was mock the Word of God, all that German higher critical theory stuff just mocked and dishonored and blasphemed the Word of God and God Himself. And I said, "I don't really see any benefit in wading through another two hundred of these. And I, at the time, really found that Psalm 1 was what forced me completely out of that program. I decided I'm not going to benefit by going in the path of sinners and standing there and sitting in the seat of a scoffer in a classroom and exposing my mind to assaults on the truth of God, not if I'm going to keep my mind pure and unspotted from the world.

In Titus chapter 1 verse 9, Paul talks about holding fast the faithful Word which is in accordance with the doctrine...holding fast, having a strong grip on the faithful Word, that's the Word of God, understanding what it teaches so that you may be able...and here's a very important idea...that you may be able to exhort in sound doctrine, listen to this, and refute those who contradict. It is essential to ministry that you exhort, that's the positive side. You exhort people in sound doctrine. It is also critical that you refute those who contradict sound doctrine.

Now by the way, that's a portion of Scripture that describes the responsibilities of elders and pastors. As a pastor, I have a two-fold responsibility to teach and to rebuke, to help teach those who receive the truth and rebuke those who are in error. We have this new evangelical climate that's been contrived where discernment is unacceptable and unwelcome and calling someone out as being in error is absolutely intolerable and therefore error wins the day...error wins the day.

Discernment will only thrive in an environment of confrontation. Discernment will only thrive when you understand that there is antithesis and thesis, there is black and white, there is true and false, there is right and wrong, and you not only have a responsibility to proclaim the right, but to expose the wrong. That's part of our responsibility as guardians of the truth.

There's a third cause of the lack of discernment that I'll just bring before you. And I don't know exactly how to frame it but the third cause is a preoccupation with image and influence as a key to evangelization. This is a big issue and I don't want to get too...I don't want to get too involved in this. I could, but I'll try to resist it.

The idea is that the church somehow is more effective in evangelism if it can create an environment that somehow embraces unbelievers. This is what all the user-friendly, seeker-friendly church movement comes from which really the originator of that, as I pointed out on Sunday, is Robert Schuller and it was picked up by Bill Hybels Willow Creek and it's been spread from there all over the place.

But the idea is, that effective evangelism is a product of influence, making people sort of feel good about the church, making people feel good about Christianity and Christians. And so obviously then, you can't confront them with truth. You can't confront them boldly with truth. You can't confront their sin. You can't confront their error. You can't call them to repentance because that doesn't make them feel good, that offends them.

So the idea is, let's get all the offenses out, anything that we think is a negative influence. We redefine the church, reinvent the church, stripped of anything that anybody might feel is somehow offensive or, listen to this, or even different. Hymns are different. The world doesn't identify with those. Sermons, the world doesn't identify with those. That's why George Barnas(?) says, "The only hope for the church in the future is to get rid of preachers." Because people don't identify with preaching. People don't identify with old hymns. They don't identify with church music. They don't identify with pastoral prayers. They don't identify with the Lord's table and communion. They don't identify with baptism. That isn't something they're familiar with, that's not sort of user-friendly.

So we just wipe it all out even though that's what the New Testament defines as the life of the church. And the illusion is that somehow we're going to be able to influence them into Christianity by cutting out everything that's offensive to them, reinventing the church so that the church is just another form of entertainment with psychology sort of stuck in there to boost their self-esteem. And then we sort of subtly sneak in a minimalist's kind of gospel.

I said this, I think, a week ago at the church, this is a myth, the myth of influence. If you've seen the latest Ligonier ministry Tabletalk, it's on the myth of influence. It's extremely well written, the great articles. You ought to get a copy of it and read it. The idea that anybody gets saved because of somebody else's influence is really false. The only reason people get saved is because they hear and believe the gospel. I'm not saying you shouldn't live a life that demonstrates the power of Christ, you should. I'm not saying that people don't see your life and glorify your Father who is in heaven, because the Bible says they do.

But the real influence is the influence of a godly life, but that's not enough until they hear the truth. It's not the style of our music that gets people converted. It's not because of the entertainment level that they enjoy that gets them converted. Sooner or later you've got to get down to confronting them with the message and my judgment is sooner is better than later. So what are we waiting for? Let's just get them to hear the message, that's how they're going to be saved. Take out the preaching of sin,

take out the preaching of hell, take out repentance, take out the cross, and then people will feel comfortable. That's the new trend. Build an image of love, care, being nice and if everybody is nice, they like us, they might like Jesus. That is tragically not the case.

When Jesus came preaching, He came preaching repentance. They hated Him for it. They sought to kill Him and eventually they executed Him. They did the same to all the Apostles. They've been doing it to the faithful preachers throughout all of the history of the church. There's only two possible...well three possible reactions to the gospel. One would be indifference, the other would be faith and the other would be hostility. You have to live with the reality of that.

So the church has had this illusion somehow that we can wipe out everything that offends. And somehow influence people to be saved in an inoffensive way. Eventually you've got to get to the offense, you might as well start there because until they're offended about their own sins, and their violation of the holiness of God, they aren't going to come penitently to the Savior.

Well there are a lot of other things we could say about that. Let me just give you a fourth thing to think about if you're making a little list. Another reason we have a lack of discernment is because of the failure to properly interpret Scripture. This kind of follows along...a failure to properly interpret Scripture. This is like running fingernails down the blackboard for me, when I hear somebody speak who misinterprets Scripture. It is a grievous thing to me and I'll just give you a simple statement that I gave you some months ago.

The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture...the meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. If you don't have the meaning, you don't have the Scripture. So if you misinterpret the Scripture, that's not the Scripture. Don't say God said...and then misinterpret Scripture. If you're going to say "God said," then you have to interpret it correctly. And yet today, there's very little interest in careful, biblical interpretation.

I was reading about a guy named Bill Hamon, H-a-m-o-n. And he is a minister, preacher, evangelist, Bible teacher, and he says this. He advises people to ignore reason, ignore logic, ignore common sense when attempting to bear witness with accuracy to the Scripture.

How are you going to accurately interpret the Bible without your mind? Without your reason? In fact, he says, "The Spirit will help you interpret Scripture by giving you strong sensations in your upper abdominal area. When you get a message of no in your upper abdominal area, or be careful., or something's not right, it will manifest itself in a nervous, jumpy, uneasy feeling. And there is that Holy Spirit witness that there's a deep unintelligible message that something's wrong."

"On the other hand," he says, "when God is bearing witness with our spirit, that the interpretation is correct, then our upper abdominal area reacts with an unexplainable peace and joy and a warm

feeling.” Gee. This guy needs to go to a nutritionist and do something about his diet. Too much chile.

Well here's a quote. “In other words, ignore your mind, forget your beliefs, disregard your theology and common sense and wait for the sensation in your upper abdominal area.” You say, “That's wacky.” Of course that's wacky. But that's the kind of guy that's featured on TBN and nobody will question the legitimacy of that. This kind of subjectivism is frightening...frightening.

And then, you know, this is something I was talking to our staff about last week. Paul says in 2 Timothy, “Preach the Word.” And then he says, “Continue in the things you've learned from me. Things you've learned from me give to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.” You know those passages. As a person who teaches the Word of God, my passion is to make sure that I'm consistent with the men of the past. In other words, I want to...when I want to know whether I'm right, I don't wait for some upper abdominal feeling. If I want to know whether I'm right, I'll go back and read somebody in the past who had illumination, who had a God-blessed great ministry. I may go all the way back to the Reformers. I may go back and read John Calvin. I may go back and read the Puritans, mention Jonathan Edwards, or John Owen. If I have any question about whether I'm right in the interpretation of Scripture, inevitably I go backwards. I don't look for a contemporary writer. I don't go to the bookstore and say, “You know, do you have any new books, you know, on contemporary Christian psychology, or some popular Christian book.” I certainly don't look for fiction.

If I want to test my interpretation of Scripture, invariably I go backwards to those in the past who have the noble, proven, interpreters of Scripture whose books are still in print because they have stood the test of time and the scrutiny of scholarship. And I go back to make sure that I'm not inventing something. I just want to take the baton from somebody. I want to interpret the Word of God the way it's always been interpreted and I want to be faithful to those in the past who were led by the Spirit of God to understand the Word of God.

In fact, I'm far more drawn to past literature than I am to present literature. You can put all of the books from the last five years in my office on one shelf and all the rest of the say four or five thousand books there are from the past because there is a continuity of the work of the Spirit of God in the preservation of the truth and I want to remain in that continuity. And one of the things that frightens me greatly about contemporary preaching, it frightens me greatly is this idea that you cut off from the past completely. Preachers today want to invent their own style. They want to give their own message. Do their own insights. They have very little, if any, interest in the past. They don't read the great theologians and the great commentators of the past. They don't expose themselves to that. It is a level of egotism that frankly is frightening to me, to all of a sudden pop on the scene and say, “Forget the past, forget the theology of the past, forget the great writers of the past. This is my cool insight.” That is frightening egotism, scary.

You go into a...hear these people preach who just give you all their own little insights, that's scary. I want to be in the great tradition of those who passed the truth on down from generation to generation to generation so pardon me if I include in my little book Jonathan Edwards. But I'm very glad to stand exactly where Jonathan Edwards stood and proclaim the same truth that concerned him in his day.

You have in contemporary evangelicalism today a stylizing of preaching, a stylizing that has literally cut off the church from its heritage. And they wipe out the hymns. We don't want any hymns in here. Nobody likes hymns. Listen, there's a reason that hymns last, and I'll tell you what it is. They were written by men who knew theology. And the bad hymns disappear over the centuries. The hymns that convey the profound realities of theology hammered out through the centuries, those hymns last and those hymns are a phenomenal legacy to the church because they convey that theology. But the contemporary idea is whack off the past...whack it off. We're an island and we'll reinvent the church. We'll reinvent teaching. We'll reinvent Bible interpretation. We don't need the past. We don't need its hymnology. We don't need its theology. We don't need its commentaries, interpretation. That's frightening.

And what you have is inept and inadequate and non-historic interpretation of Scripture, if in fact you have any interpretation of Scripture at all. We have one job as preachers, and that is to tell people what God meant by what He said, that's it. My whole life is about one book and only one book and that's it. What does God mean in this book? That's it...that's ministry, nothing more and nothing less. To declare the whole counsel of God, that's my responsibility.

So, when you think about the whole issue of discernment, you have to realize that discernment cannot survive in an environment where doctrine doesn't matter. Discernment cannot survive in an environment where people refuse to be polemical, where they refuse to debate or argue or test things or disagree or say something's wrong. Discernment cannot survive in an environment where everybody's concerned about somehow wiping out all that offends. And discernment cannot survive in an environment where there's virtually no interest in maintaining the great truth that has been passed down from generation to generation through a careful, thoughtful, scholarly, faithful interpretation of Scripture.

The future of the church is going to depend upon discerning leadership. I tell you, it's sad. You can look at some of the biggest Christian organizations in the world and they are led by people who have influence and power but have no real ability to rightly divide Scripture. And they are the power brokers in evangelicalism that define evangelicalism in its broadest definitions. So we have to get back to preaching the Word, to rightly dividing.

Turn to 2 Timothy for just a minute, one other verse and then I'll quit and let you go today. But in 2 Timothy chapter 2. "Be diligent...verse 15...present yourselves approved to God as a workman, a

craftsman who doesn't need to be ashamed.” I don't know about you, but I don't want to be ashamed of my ministry. I don't want to be ashamed of my life. So if I'm going to present my ministry to God so that I can be approved so that I'm not ashamed of it, I have to handle accurately the Word of Truth. I mean, how clear is that? It's got to be handled accurately. That's where it starts. You interpret it accurately. You proclaim it boldly. You proclaim it on a positive level, exhorting. You proclaim it on a negative level, confronting and refuting error.

And you stay away...verse 16...you stay away from this worldly, empty talk that leads to further ungodliness. This kind of talk that spreads like gangrene. Gangrene is not a good thing. It destroys. Just like Hymenaeus and Philetus with their gangrenous chatter about nothing, men who went astray from the truth, upset the faith of people. Failing to interpret Scripture accurately and carefully and precisely, being preoccupied with worldly influence and image, failing to be antithetical, black and white about issues of truth, disdaining clarity and conviction in doctrine leads to a serious onslaught on discernment.

Just one other thing to mention, the final point in the little points I want to give you is a failure to discipline in the church...a failure to discipline in the church. I'm not going to talk about it, I know you know about church discipline. This is deadly to the church. This is deadly to discernment because what it says, if I know there's sin in the church and I don't do what Matthew 18 says and I don't do discipline in the church, then what I'm saying is...well I know what the Bible says, I interpret it rightly, but it just doesn't matter in your life. That is, if somebody rises up in the church and teaches falsely and I don't deal with them, or somebody lives in sin and iniquity and I don't deal with them and the church doesn't deal with them, what we're saying is the truth doesn't matter. It's the truth but it doesn't matter. And that is typical of churches today. There's no church discipline so even if they do tell the truth, they will not apply the truth. Churches tolerate sinning Christians, they therefore lower the value of the truth because if the truth doesn't have to be lived, then what's the point of it. As a result they dull the edge of the sword of the Spirit. You don't ever want to seek a place where non-believers and sinners feel comfortable, where Christians are never confronted with their sin, where error is never dealt with. Because what that does is diminish the truth. God's truth is for application. It's for application for those in error and those in sin.

It's just not happening in churches today. They will not apply the truth. I talked to a guy who was a staff member at a large seeker-friendly church and I said, “If you had a homosexual guy in your church, you knew he was living in homosexuality, how long would it be before you would personally go to that person and confront him about his sin?”

I'll never forget his answer. He said, “Ah, probably be a year and a half or maybe two, until he felt really comfortable in the church.” What is that? You don't think the Lord's church is to be holy? You don't think the Lord cares about purity? You don't think that guy is a worthy-enough soul that you would confront his sin so that he could repent and be saved? This is the issue of discipline,

confrontation. And it's another reason why there's no discernment in the church because nobody even if they come to the truth is willing, it seems, to apply the truth.

Well enough about that. Next time, on Friday, I want to talk to you about how to become a discerning Christian.

Father, we thank You this morning for this great time of worship and music with the guys singing for us. We thank You for their leading us to honor You and to praise You and to glorify Your name. We just pray that You will bless them and their families to the places they travel and we thank You, Lord, for the call to discernment. We thank You that You have raised us up in a sense sort of counter-culture in the evangelical world as well as the world outside. And we pray, O God, that we would be faithful to the truth, to live it and proclaim it and apply it in our own lives and in the lives of those around us as we serve You in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).